United Nations

Press Release

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TUESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- General Assembly opens forty-sixth session; elects new President; admits seven States to United Nations membership.

- Samir S. Shihabi of Saudi Arabia is President of forty-sixth session of General Assembly.

- Secretary-General sends letter to Foreign Ministers of all United Nations Member States to address "worst financial crisis" since Organization was founded.

- Pledging conference seeks funds for Horn of Africa; Secretary-General says recent political breakthroughs in region give rise to hope for millions of refugees, returnees and persons affected by drought.

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The General Assembly this morning opened its forty-sixth regular session. After the traditional moment of silent prayer or meditation, Member States elected the Permanent Representative of Saudi Arabia, Samir S. Shihabi, as the new President of the General Assembly. He was elected by a majority of 83 votes. The candidates of Papua New Guinea and Yemen received 47 votes and 20 votes, respectively. All three candidates were put forward by the Asian Group.

In his opening address, President Shihabi spoke extensively about the growing social and economic disparities in the world. He cited the debt burden of developing countries, saying that it was a "stark picture of the imbalance in human society which, if we do not deal with it urgently, will disrupt the balance in every field".

He called on Member States to evaluate the capabilities of the United Nations in its larger dimension and the abilities of the Secretariat as the executive organ, and to study the manner in which it could be enabled to meet its responsibilities.

(more)

For information media—not an official record

The Assembly decided, by consensus, to admit seven new States to United Nations membership: the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Republic of Korea, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

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The General Assembly today elected Samir S. Shihabi of Saudi Arabia as the President for its forty-sixth session.

Mr. Shihabi has served his country as an Ambassador for more than 27 years -- since 1983 as the Permanent Representative to the United Nations. He joined the Saudi Arabian Foreign Ministry in 1949 and later served as First Secretary in Switzerland and as Chargé d'affaires in Rome.

In 1961, Mr. Shihabi was appointed Director of the Foreign Ministry's United Nations and International Organizations Department -- his initial professional involvement in the work of the United Nations. He has also been his country's Ambassador in Turkey, Somalia and Pakistan. Since 1974, he has also been a member of Saudi Arabia's delegation to the United Nations for 15 General Assembly sessions, including his service as Permanent Representative.

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Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar has sent a letter to the Foreign Ministers of all Member States of the United Nations to address what he calls the Organization's "worst financial crisis" since it was founded.

A United Nations spokesman told correspondents today that the Secretary-General had been forced to borrow from peace-keeping funds since the third week of August in order to meet basic operating costs of the Organization.

Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar had written to thank the 51 States which had paid their 1991 assessed contributions in full. To the other Member States currently in arrears he had written, "We thus face a stark alternative: either we manage effectively to address the financial problem, or the United Nations will be rendered incapable for lack of resources to perform its far-reaching functions with the required effectiveness, especially for the maintenance of peace and security."

The Secretary-General appealed personally to the Ministers to make every effort to ensure that the countries concerned pay their full assessments by the end of September.

According to a report released yesterday on status of contributions as of 1 September, unpaid assessments to the regular budget total $809.5 million, of which $471.4 million relate to the current year and $338.1 million to prior years. Unpaid assessments towards the peace-keeping budget as of 1 September amount to $486.9 million.

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Speakers at the Donors' Pledging Conference on Emergency Assistance to the Countries of the Horn of Africa have called for coordinated United Nations action to meet the needs of millions of refugees, returnees and persons affected by drought in that region.

The Pledging Conference, which was held yesterday at Headquarters, was convened in response to a consolidated inter-agency appeal for some $400 million to cover emergency assistance for Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti and Kenya.

In an opening statement, Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar said civil war, economic deterioration and an unusually severe drought had combined to threaten the lives and well-being of over 22 million people in the region. Traditional coping mechanisms had been exhausted and people had been forced to eat grass and leaves. Fortunately, the Secretary-General went on, there had recently been several political breakthroughs in the region that had given rise to hope for the millions at risk.

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